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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC No. 00332-84
13 January 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : Chairman, National Intelligence Council *Sg*
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM : National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe

SUBJECT : West European Views on Central America

1. The Department of State recently asked embassies in Western Europe to comment on host country views of Central America. We thought you would be interested in a summary of the replies.

2. Public Information Campaign. Despite the Department's efforts to increase the flow of information and high level visitors to European capitals, attitudes generally remain critical of US policies in the region. The tone and temper of that opposition has softened in the past six months, however, partly in response to the greater publicity given to official US concern about human rights violations in El Salvador and to the anti-democratic leanings of the Sandinista regime. West European governments have been increasingly willing to acknowledge the complexities of Central American politics and have been more sympathetic to US goals if not methods in the region. Moreover, although publics remain largely indifferent and overwhelmingly uninformed about U.S. concerns in Central America, there appears to be a greater willingness by the press and even some critics on the moderate left to listen to and attempt to understand, US positions. The growing awareness of East bloc involvement in the region has contributed to the perceptible change in European views. Some leaders in the Socialist International have been especially chagrined by the revelations of radical Socialist activity uncovered in Grenada.

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3. El Salvador and Nicaragua. The hardest West European perception to overcome is the belief that US policy is aimed at a military solution in both countries. Some West European officials -- especially in France, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries -- continue to believe that we will ultimately intervene militarily in El Salvador, and that the US is interested not "in reforming Nicaragua but in destroying it." The recent Sandinista "peace offensive" is viewed in some capitals as a sign of flexibility that they fear the Reagan Administration will dismiss too readily. According to our embassy in Madrid, the Nicaraguan initiative may reverse positive trends in Spanish Socialist thinking, if we do not appear responsive.

4. Grenada. US actions in Grenada have had a curious effect on European thinking. On the one hand, it appears to have heightened fears that the US is content on solving problems in the region -- which are seen as primarily socio-economic ones -- through the use of force. On the other hand, some European observers (notably in France, Spain, and Italy) believe that the U.S. operation in Grenada and the possibility of its repetition in Nicaragua, is in some measure responsible for the Sandinistas' new interest in negotiations and alleged commitment to democratic elections. Moreover, French officials now acknowledge that the US has vital interests in the region, an appreciation that was largely missing prior to Grenada.

5. Intelligence Implications. Almost every embassy encouraged Washington to continue providing more information on Central America that can be used to educate influential journalists and key ministry officials -- the lone exception being our post in Denmark, which believes greater visibility to our policies will stimulate further public opposition. This exception notwithstanding, our ambassadors believe that irregular reporting from Washington needs to be improved by setting periodic summaries of key developments in a broader context. As our Paris embassy reported:

"Latin America experts here are not well informed, and though they do not always agree with us, a careful presentation of facts can influence their thinking. They readily acknowledge that the US government has better intelligence in the area than they. In order to maintain a credible dialogue and counter their views with relevant facts we need timely and in-depth analyses.

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7. Comment: We have placed the issue of European and Socialist International attitudes toward Central America on our Warning and Forecast agenda for next week to focus Community attention on the analytic weaknesses our embassies perceive in this area, and on possible additional collection requirements on S.I. attitudes and strategies in the region.

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